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THREE ARAMAIC SEALS OF THE ACHAEMENID PERIOD

By S. SHAKED and J. NAVEH

I. THE SEAL OF ḤANANDAT (PLATE 1)

This seal, of unknown provenance, has an Aramaic inscription which is engraved on a scaraboid hematite pierced lengthwise. It measures 17×13 mm, with 9 mm of thickness.¹ The oval surface, which is slightly damaged at one point, is divided by a double line into two registers. Six letters are engraved in the upper, and five in the lower register, giving the following reading:

לחננדת

דתננא

The letters are fairly large and fill the whole space. All the letters in the upper register stand at the same height on the double line. Normally, however, *lamed* is higher than the ceiling line of the other letters, while *nun* and *taw* are usually drawn with a stroke which goes below the bottom line formed by the other letters. In the lower register the *taw* and the two *nuns* seem to go farther down than the *alef* and the *dalet*.

It is not easy to suggest a precise date for this short inscription by using palaeographic considerations. Each letter separately may be assigned to a date as early as the mid-VIIth century B.C. The forms of these letters appear already in the early cursive Aramaic texts (cf. e.g. the ostrakon and dockets from Assur). The style of the script can be considered lapidary or even vulgar cursive. The uneven stances of the *dalets* and the *taws* and the shapes of the *nuns* seem to speak in favour of vulgar cursive. In both styles the letter forms occurring here, including the archaic *alef*, are attested also in the Persian period.² As we seem to have here the undoubted presence of at least one Persian name, the dating should be in the late VIth or in the Vth century B.C.

The text of the seal consists of two proper names, preceded by the preposition denoting possession, *l-*. It may be translated as follows:

“(Belonging) to ḥnndt (son of) dtmn”.

According to this reading, both names contain the element *dt*, which is easily recognized as the Persian word *dāta*- “given, created”, a word which is frequently encountered in theophoric proper names. However, since *dalet* and *resh* are not clearly distinguished in the script, the first name could equally well be read ḥnnrt, a reading which can be explained as containing the Babylonian divine name Inurta or Ninurta,³ and as first element *hen* “favour” or “grace”. The meaning of the name would in that case be “the grace of (N)inurta”. An analogy for this type

of name is afforded by the name *hnyh*, which occurs three times in one of the Aramaic papyri from Egypt. To this name the Nabatean name *hn'l* has been compared.⁴

If we do retain the reading *hnndt*, we should be able to identify in *hnn* a reflection of an Iranian divine name or attribute.⁵ A fairly close form to this occurs in an Aramaic silver plaque, which carries the proper name *hnbndk*, where the second element, *bndk*, meaning "slave", shows quite clearly that we should expect a divine name to precede it. The first editor of the inscription, A. Dupont-Sommer, who consulted E. Benveniste for the Iranian elements in the inscription,⁶ left the name unexplained. A plausible explanation was suggested by M. N. Bogoljubov,⁷ who pointed out that *hn* could be a reflection of Iranian *xwanh*, a genitive form of *xwar*- "sun". Iranian *xw*- does in fact turn up in a number of Aramaic loan words and proper names as *h*-.⁸ The element *hnn* in *hnndt*, however, cannot be derived from *xwanh*. One may wonder whether it can be explained by assuming it to represent the Iranian word *xwanwant* "luminous", which occurs in the Avesta not only as an adjective but also as a proper name (in Yt. 13:117).⁹ It may well be the attribute of a deity, probably the sky, cf. the name Asmō. *xvanvant*.¹⁰ However, the absence of a *waw* after the first *nun*, and the *-d*- for the expected *-td-*, cause some difficulty.

The reading of the second word of the inscription, *dtnn'*, is not entirely certain. The first letter, which lacks its bottom part, admits also of being interpreted as *bet* or 'ayin, besides the possibility of reading *dalet* or *resh*. We retain, however, as most plausible, the reading suggested here, *dtnn'*. This name contains, besides the Iranian past participle passive *dāta*, the name of the Babylonian goddess Nana. In West Semitic this divine name is spelled *nn'* or *nny*. In the Hermopolis papyri we have *nnyhm*, (fem. pr. n.).¹¹ In Heshbon the name *nnydn*¹² is attested, in Arad *'bdmny*,¹³ on a clay tablet from Nippur *zbdnn'*,¹⁴ and it is a common element in the proper names from Hatra.¹⁵ The bare name of the deity is also found as a proper name. In the dockets from Assur Lidzbarski read *nn'* and *nny*.¹⁶ In Palmyra we have a woman called *nn'* daughter of *nrbwl*.¹⁷ In Hatra *nny* occurs as a masculine name.¹⁸ In the Avesta the name Nana-rāsti (Yt. 13:115), which may deceptively look as if it contains this divine name, is better explained in terms of an Iranian derivation.¹⁹ An Iranian proper name with the element *nny* occurs however quite clearly in the Sogdian name *nnyβntk* "slave of Nanai".²⁰ The inscription from Kесеceк Kōyū in Cilicia has the name *nnšt*, which has been explained as Nana with either a Cilician ending *-št* or with the ending which is encountered in Greek personal names: *-stes*, *-sta*, *-stis*.²¹ An alternative explanation in Iranian terms may also be offered: Nana-š(y)āti would mean "the joy of Nana".

Achaemenid seals are either cylindrical or conoid, and the latter often have an octagonal base. Persian seals following the Neo-Babylonian tradition were generally made of grey or bluish chalcedony. Usually they carried cultic scenes.²²

As our seal is made of hematite and has a scaraboid shape, it seems to follow the western tradition. Its owner may have been a Persian official who resided in Syria or Palestine, the seal having been cut by a local artisan.

2. THE SEAL OF ADA-NANA (PLATES 2-3)

This seal was found by Professor Dan Barag in the hands of an antique dealer in Jerusalem, and we are indebted to him for drawing our attention to it. Its provenance is unknown, and so is its present location. It is a block measuring c. $30 \times 20 \times 15$ mm, of which four panels were engraved, whereas the additional two panels are smooth and contain only the holes of the perforation in the middle. This perforation probably indicates that the stone was meant to be suspended by a cord. Three panels are inscribed with letters. The wide panels contain the letter 'd' (or 'r') and *nn* respectively, whereas one of the narrow panels has a lapidary *yod*. The other narrow panel seems to have an unepigraphic sign engraved on it. This sign looks like a flying bird or a cross. The seal thus has four surfaces on which characters are engraved, and they may have been intended to be used consecutively, like a cylinder seal, although the various panels of writing do not form a circle, and are divided from each other by angles of approximately 90 degrees.

Palaeographically this inscription too, like the preceding one, does not give a clear dating. The lapidary form of the *yod* hints towards the Achaemenid period. The closed head of the *resh* or *dalet*, although not very common, has parallels in the lapidary Aramaic script of the Vth century B.C.²³

The text of the inscription is difficult of interpretation, partly because it is not clear at what point one should start, and whether one has to combine the reading of the panels into one sequence of signs or to read each one separately. It is probably best however to regard the unepigraphic sign, which looks vaguely like a cross, as a divider of some kind, and to read the letters engraved on the stone in the following order:

✚ | אַנַּן | , | אַדָּא

In the first word it is not easy to decide between *dalet* and *resh*. If we opt for a *dalet*, this is because it allows us to interpret the resulting word as Iranian *Adā*,²⁴ the name of the goddess "Reward". The letter *yod*, which is written in the narrow panel between the two wide panels, remains a puzzle, and does not admit of a clear solution. The next wide panel has the familiar divine name Nana. The unepigraphic symbol which follows, as well as the *yod* on the preceding narrow panel, may represent some kind of reference to a person, office or function, which one cannot determine from the scanty data at our disposal.

If we ignore these symbols, it seems possible to assume that the seal belonged to a person by the name of Ada-Nana, presumably an Iranian person, who may be either a man or a woman. It is alternatively possible to consider, with due

reservation, the possibility that the *yod* fulfils some grammatical function in the construction, and to assume that it represents the Iranian relative pronoun *ya-* (i.e. *ya[h]-* in the nominative) “who”. In that case we may have something like an Old Persian phrase which may be rendered by: “Adā who is Nana”. This would be so unusual among Aramaic seals and inscriptions of the period as to render this hypothesis very doubtful. We do have, however, one instance of an inscription in Aramaic characters which apparently contains an Old Persian text.²⁵ If this is borne in mind the suggestion that the present seal contains a short Persian phrase may seem less bold. Still, the introduction of the *izafe*-like pronoun, interposed as it is between two words which look like divine or human proper names, must be considered bizarre.

All in all, until a better solution is found to the problem of reading this seal, one must be content with the assumption that it contains the compound name Ada-Nana, and ignore the two symbols *yod* and the cross-like emblem as defying interpretation.

3. THE SEAL OF HAM-MITHRA (PLATE 4)

The seal under discussion is in the collection of Dr. Richard Grey Ainley of Santa Maria, California. It is a cylinder seal made of chalcedony and measuring 23 mm in height, with a circumference of approximately 38 mm. It has as part of its pattern two winged creatures on two sides of a tree, with a winged disc above.²⁶ It was described in a catalogue entitled *Antiquities International*, where the reading given is inaccurate.

The inscription, which can be dated within the Vth century B.C., reads as follows:

𐤠𐤇𐤌𐤕 𐤇𐤌𐤕

“The seal of Ham-mithra”

The name is obviously Iranian. The reading of the Aramaic characters as they stand suggests that it is composed of the elements *ham* and *mithra*. The latter word, besides standing for the name of the well-known Iranian deity, denotes also “pact, treaty” (a meaning which has been argued to be the original sense of the word). The compound *hamiçiya-*, which corresponds quite closely to the spelling we have here, is attested in Old Persian in the sense of “rebel, insurgent”.²⁷ It may seem a strange word to use for naming a child, but it is apparently attested in the Elamite script among the Persepolis documents under the form Hamitura.²⁸ It is true that Gershevitch²⁹ understands this name as denoting “intriguer”, but it is doubtful whether this would be considered an acceptable personal name. However, since *ham-mithra* on the face of it need denote nothing more than “ally, associate”, it seems equally possible to assume that this original meaning of the compound was still in use, although it had obviously acquired a narrower

definition in the political jargon of the court. In the political language it apparently came to designate members of a group of people who formed an alliance for the overthrow of the king. The two meanings of the term could perfectly well coexist without interfering with each other.

One other possibility exists for reading and explaining the name; it can be read as Humithra "Of good treaty, keeping his word well". This name is quite well attested thanks to Elamite transcriptions of Old Persian names.³⁰ Although this name gives an entirely satisfactory sense, it seems doubtful whether the spelling *hmtr* does indeed reflect Humithra.

NOTES

¹ Professor Dan Barag noticed the seal in the hands of an antique dealer and drew Professor N. Avigad's attention to it. It is from Professor Avigad that we obtained a photograph of this seal. We thank both these scholars for their help.

² See J. Naveh, *The development of the Aramaic Script*, Jerusalem 1970.

³ Cf. H. Tadmor, "A note on the seal of Mannu-ki-Inurta", *IEJ* 15 (1965), pp. 233–234. On the deity Ninurta cf. E. Dhorme, *Les religions de Babylonie et d'Assyrie* (Mana, Les anciennes religions orientales), Paris 1949, pp. 102 ff. and pp. 128 ff.

⁴ Cf. A. Cowley, *Aramaic papyri of the fifth century B.C.*, Oxford 1923, No. 81:11, 37, 127; P. Grelot, *Documents araméens d'Égypte*, Paris 1974, p. 474; W. Kornfeld, *Onomastica aramaica aus Ägypten*, Vienna 1978, p. 50; J. Cantineau, *Le nabatéen*, II, Paris 1932, p. 98.

⁵ There is of course also a class of Semitic names which start with the element *hnn-*, especially in Syriac; cf. Henanišo', a VIIth-century A.D. person (e.g. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale*, Paris 1902, p. 215 etc.), but this element requires a theophoric element to complement it, while *dr* in its turn also requires a theophoric element to go with it.

⁶ A. Dupont-Sommer, "Une plaquette d'argent à inscription araméenne", *Iranica Antiqua* 4 (1964), pp. 119–132.

⁷ M. N. Bogoljubov, "Aramejskaja nadpis `na serebrjanoj plastinke iz Irana", *Palestinskij Sbornik* 21(84) (1970), pp. 87–90.

⁸ Cf. words such as *hrzmy*, *hršyn*, *hpthpt*, mentioned by Bogoljubov, *op cit.*, and perhaps *hrtk*, cf. J. C. Greenfield and S. Shaked, *ZDMG* 122 (1972), p. 43f, if the original form was **xwartaka-*. See also M. N. Bogoljubov, "Potečnyj titul axemenidskogo voenačal'nika v verxnem Jegipte", *Palestinskij Sbornik* 17(80) (1967), pp. 21–25. W. B. Henning, "Ein persischer Titel im Altaramäischen", *In memoriam Paul Kahle*, Berlin 1968, pp. 138–145, esp. n. 37.

⁹ Cf. Ch. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, col. 1865; F. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch*, 181; M. Mayrhofer, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*, Bd. 1, Fasz. 1, Wien 1977, p. 102; W. Hinz, *Altiranisches Sprachgut der Nebenüberlieferungen*, Wiesbaden 1975, pp. 139 f. The name is attested also in the Elamite texts of Persepolis, if the reconstruction by I. Gershevitch, "Island-bay and the lion", *BSOAS* 33 (1970), p. 87 (cf. M. Mayrhofer, *Onomastica persepolitana*, Vienna 1973, 188, Nos. 8.940, 8.945), is accepted. See also W. Hinz, *Neue Wege im Altpersischen*, Wiesbaden 1973, p. 112; Idem, *Altiranisches Sprachgut der Nebenüberlieferungen*, Wiesbaden 1975, pp. 139 f.

¹⁰ Mayrhofer, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch* (above, n. 8), 22 No. 31, and 102 No. 402.

¹¹ According to J. Milik, *Biblica* 48 (1967), p. 560, it means "Nanai est la chaleur (du rapport conjugal d'où est issu l'enfant)". Grelot, *op. cit.* (n. 4), p. 481 takes into consideration the possibility that the name may mean "Nanay, commande!", with *hm* derived from Akkadian *hammu*.

¹² F. M. Cross, "An ostrakon from Heshbon", *Andrews University Semitic Studies* 7 (1969), pp. 223–229.

¹³ J. Naveh, "Aramaic ostraca from Tel Arad", in: Y. Aharoni, *Arad inscriptions*, Jerusalem 1981, p. 158, No. 12.

- ¹⁴ L. Delaporte, *Épigraphes araméens*, Paris 1912, No. 71.
- ¹⁵ F. Vattioni, *Le iscrizioni di Hatra*, Naples 1981, p. 23 No. 1.
- ¹⁶ M. Lidzbarski, *Altaramäische Urkunden aus Assur*, Leipzig 1921, No. 1, line 4; No., 6, line 9.
- ¹⁷ J. K. Stark, *Personal names in Palmyrene inscriptions*, Oxford 1971, pp. 39, 99.
- ¹⁸ Vattioni, *op. cit.* (n. 14), p. 24, No. 4.
- ¹⁹ Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, col. 1041; Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch*, pp. 220 f.; M. Mayrhofer, *Iranisches Personennamenbuch*, I, 1, Wien 1977, p. 63, No. 227.
- ²⁰ Cf. W. B. Henning, *Sogdica*, London 1943, p. 77. Apart from *nnyßntk* we also encounter in Sogdian the name *nnyδ't*, *nnyδβ'r*. In the Mug documents the name *nnyprn* is attested, cf. V. A. Livšic, *Sogdijskie dokumenty s Gory Mug*, II, Moscow 1962, p. 53.
- ²¹ Donner-Röllig, *Kanaanäische und Aramäische Inschriften*, No. 258; J. J. Koopmans, *Aramäische Chrestomathie*, II, Leiden 1962, pp. 167 f.; R. S. Hanson, "Aramaic funerary and boundary inscriptions from Asia Minor", *BASOR* 192 (1968), p. 8. Various names composed of Nana, Neni and similar forms, to which several suffixes are attached, are attested in Lycian onomastics, the base element meaning "uncle" or "aunt"; cf. Joh. Sundwall, *Die einheimischen Namen der Lykier nebst einen Verzeichnisse kleinasiatischer Namenstamme*, Leipzig 1913 (*Klio*, Beiheft 11), p. 196, as well as pp. 165 ff., 272 f., 288.
- ²² Cf. C. J. Gadd in A. U. Pope (ed.), *A Survey of Persian Art*, Oxford 1938, vol. I, pp. 383 ff.
- ²³ Cf. N. Avigad, *Qedem* 4 (1976), Fig. 18.
- ²⁴ For Iranian *Ādā*- cf. Bartholomae, *Altiranisches Wörterbuch*, col. 320 f.; Louis H. Gray, *Foundations of the Iranian religion* (*Journal of the K.R. Cama Oriental Institute* 15), 1929, p. 130.
- ²⁵ See lately R. N. Frye, "The 'Aramaic' inscription on the tomb of Darius", *Iranica Antiqua* 17 (1982), pp. 85–90, with plates I–IX, where previous literature is listed.
- ²⁶ A seal with a similar design, but a different inscription, is described in K. Galling, "Beschriftete Bildsiegeln des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr.", *ZDPV* 64 (1941), pp. 121–202, esp. p. 197, No. 169, Tafel 11.
- ²⁷ R. G. Kent, *Old Persian*, 2nd ed., New Haven, Conn. 1953, p. 213; Hinz, *Neue Wege im Altpersischen*, p. 136.
- ²⁸ Cf. Mayrhofer, *Onomastica persepolitana*, Wien 1973, No. 8.432; on p. 306 Mayrhofer decides that the name is not Iranian.
- ²⁹ I. Gershevitch, "Amber at Persepolis", *Studia . . . Pagliaro* II (1969), p. 177.
- ³⁰ Cf. Mayrhofer, *op. cit.*, 8.1729, 8.1732, where references to the works of Benveniste and Gershevitch will be found. Two dialectally different forms of this name occur in Elamite: one has the reading *umitra*, and the other is a reflection of the expected Old Persian form, and reads *umiša*.

PLATE I







